

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

BLM office: Bishop Field Office

EA Number: CA-170-04-26

Proposed Action Title/Type: Haystack Mineral Material Sale

Case File No.: CA-017-04-01

Location of Proposed Action: T. 15 S., R. 37 E., Sec. 29

Applicant: Dick Cheeseman, Hyatt Ready-Mix, Inc.

Need for Proposed Action: There is a current and future need for this rock to make cement for use in construction type projects for the Independence and Lone Pine communities. The current source for this material is near Bishop and Ridgecrest. Both these communities are located over 60 miles away, making it costly and inefficient to import material from these locations. No other material sources currently exist within the southern end the Owens Valley area to meet Independence and Lone Pine's community needs.

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan: This proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan dated March 25, 1993. The proposed action has been reviewed and conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Remarks: The following reflects RMP guidance that applies to this proposed action:

Page 8 - Item 5. Public Lands will be managed in a manner which recognizes the nations need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber including implementation of the Mining and Minerals Act of 1970 as it pertains to public land. [Section 102(a) (12)].

Page 14 – Item 4. Minerals: all mineral operations will conform with the state's SMARA, county and local health and operation requirements.

Page 22 – Areawide Decision: Provide salable minerals for community and private use.

A BLM Mineral Material Sale Permit in accordance with the 43 CFR 3600 regulations would be issued to authorize the proposed action. This permit would set performance standards for the permittee. A performance and reclamation bond would also be issued adequate to cover the proposed action's disturbance and to ensure payment to the government for material removed under the permit.

Description of Proposed Action: On February 17, 2004, Hiatt Ready Mix, Inc. requested BLM authorize a minerals contract for 50,000 to 90,000 tons of rock from an alluvial deposit at the foot of Inyo Mountains just south of Haystack Mountain. (see attached map). Activities would consist of the following:

- 1) Build road to access the site. The road would measure about 80 ft. by 10 ft wide and would consist of blading the upper 6 inches of soil to access the material site.
- 2) Excavate and load material using front end loader with a skeleton bucket. Material would be loaded into dump trucks and transported to a private location offsite for processing and distribution.
- 3) Use a 4000 gallon water truck to suppress airborne dust activity where and when necessary.
- 4) Rehabilitate the site restoring topographic contours, reseeding native vegetation at the site, and using signs to inform the public of the rehabilitation effort.

Mining Method:

The area proposed for mining is a rock alluvial area approximately 425 feet long with a base of 534 feet (approximately 3.6 acres). The rock material is Pre-Cretaceous metamorphic (limestone and dolomite). This dolomite has washed down from the upper elevation steep slopes and out the mouth of the canyon. The site consists of large boulders 6-24 inch in diameter. This dolomite covers Mesozoic granitics and Ordovician Marine age metamorphosed sedimentary rock. The top 6 inches of soil would be set aside for reclamation. This soil would be spread back over the area at the end of the project (three years). The rock would be removed with a skeleton bucket so that only the 6 inch to 24 inch diameter size rock is removed, thereby leaving the fine soils in place. Excavation depth would not exceed 10 feet. During the mining operations, no bench or shelf would exceed 5 feet in height. Mining truck traffic would be about 20 round trips per day for three years.

Reclamation Requirements:

The proposed site to be mined is almost exclusively rock and alluvium sedimentation. The area is very sparsely vegetated with some barrel cacti and other plants. Removing only the rock and spreading the reserved topsoil over the remaining soil would enhance the habitat for both vegetation and biological resources. Every attempt will be made to not disturb the few barrel cacti present. If possible, the cacti found in the center of the site would be transplanted along the edge of the site.

All depressions would be graded at a 2:1 slope. The reserved topsoil would be spread over the disturbed area. The area where the rock has been removed would be reseeded with seeds gathered from surrounding shrubs at a rate of two pounds per acre. A Bureau specialist would be available to oversee the seed gathering and site reseeding. Seeds would be collected in September through October which is the best time to collect seed.

The 80 foot stretch of new road would be reclaimed by scarifying the surface and reseeding. The route and project area would be signed to inform the public of the rehabilitation effort and prevent vehicle use within the site area.

The rock to be mined comprises part of the natural alluvium originating from a nearby steep canyon. The rock and other fine soil debris washes down the canyon during and after wet storm events. Reoccurring deposition of more rock throughout the alluvial fan replenishes the area and restores its natural appearance over time, usually in a few years.

Affected Environment

Soils:

Soils within the project area are comprised primarily of metamorphic and calcareous parent material. Elevations range from 2,500 to 3,500 ft. and annual precipitation averages 3-6 inches.

Vegetation:

Desert scrub makes up the plant community type at the proposed project site. Over-story species include, but are not limited to shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), cattle spinach (*Atriplex polycarpa*), bursage (*Ambrosia dumosa*), and desert tomato (*Lycium andersonii*). Understory forbs include brittlebush (*Encelia actonii*), desert trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), *Eriogonum rixfordii*, desert tobacco (*Nicotiana attenuata*), Bigelow's mirabilis (*Mirabilis bigelovii*), *Gilia latifolia* and cotton-top cactus (*Echinocactus polycephalus* var. *polycephalus*). Total plant cover ranges between 15-20%.

Special Status Plant Species:

Special Status Plant Species are those species listed by the California Native Plant Society as List 1B species, which includes plants that are rare, threatened or endangered in California and elsewhere. All of the plants constituting List 1B meet the definition of Sec. 1901, Chapter 10 (Native Plant Protection Act) or Secs. 2062 and 2067 (California Endangered Species Act) of the California Department of Fish and Game Code, and are eligible for state listing. The Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP, 1993, p. 17) stipulates yearlong protection of sensitive plants (Special Status Plants) and their associated habitats.

A rare plant species survey was conducted April 30th 2004 and no special status species were located. Species surveyed for included; *Oryctes nevadensis* (Nevada oryctes) and *Erigeron calvus* (bald daisy). Of interest was the occurrence of two species that reach their most western distributional limit in Inyo County: Rixford's buckwheat (*Eriogonum rixfordii*) and (broad-leaved gilia) *Gilia latifolia*.

Invasive Weeds, Non-Native Plant Species:

Non native plant species that occur within the project area include Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*) and red brome (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*). These species comprise approximately 5-10% of the total plant cover and are associated with areas in proximity to the access road.

Special Management Areas:

The Inyo Mountain Wilderness boundary is located approximately one-tenth of a mile east of the proposed material site's east edge. This wilderness area was designated in the California Desert Protection Act of 1994.

Visual Resources:

The proposed project area is designated as VRM Class III area which the RMP (Appendix 3) prescribes retention of the existing partial landscape's character. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate and activities may attract the attention of a casual observer from key observation points but it should not dominate the view of the observer. The primary key observation point would be along U.S. Highway 395 and State Highway 136, approximately 5 miles and 2 miles away, respectively. Evidence of past and current mining operations dot the foothills, further south toward the Dolomite private properties, and is visually evident from U.S. Highway 395 and State Highway 136.

Environmental Impacts:

The following table portrays major resources analyzed in this environmental assessment. A narrative of site specific impacts follows the table. Along with suggested mitigation measures, if applicable.

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality		X	T & E Species		X
ACECs		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Cultural Resources		X	Water Quality		X
Farmlands, Prime/unique		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Floodplains		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
Nat. Amer. Re. concerns		X	Wilderness		X

Special Management Areas:

The proposed action is not within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, nor Wild and Scenic River corridor, and there would be no impacts to any lands so designated.

The Inyo Mountain Wilderness boundary is located approximately one-tenth of a mile east of the proposed material site's east edge. Outside sights and sounds including vehicle activity,

pit operations, and airborne dust would be evident from these portions of the wilderness. Although a wilderness visitor along the boundary can experience “outside sights and sounds” of nearby power-lines, some roads, etc., the limited outstanding opportunities for solitude within the immediate wilderness area would be further and incrementally affected by the proposed material site operations.

Additionally, a possibility exists that the proponent could exceed the project boundaries and trespass into unauthorized areas, including wilderness, if project boundaries are not clearly identified on the ground, monitored and maintained.

Visual Resources:

The proposed project would conform with the VRM Class III standards. From nearby dirt roads that are infrequently used and not considered key observation points, the project would have a short term visual contrast to the casual observer.

From the key observation points of US Highway 395 and State Highway 136, the proposed activity might attract some attention of motorists but would not dominate their view because the proposal would be small in scale to the broad mountainsides and alluvial vistas that comprise this area of the valley. Dust borne matter may be the most noticeable impact that would be mitigated by water spreading or increasing water spreading at the site. The temporary nature of the proposal would also limit short term visual contrasts to a three year period. The proposed project area would begin to restore its natural appearance once rehabilitation commences and several flash floods occur in the area.

Botanical Resources:

Impacts of the proposed action to the vegetation would entail removal of all vegetation growing within the portion of the alluvial fan proposed for development. Overall, this plant community type is relatively intact along the western escarpment of the Inyo Mountains, but there are uncommon plant species that add to the compositional and structural diversity of this site that would be impacted.

Impacts of the proposed action would also increase the invasion of non-native plants due to 1. the type and intensity of surface ground disturbance, 2. the removal of intact cryptobiotic soil crust which reduces weed invasion, and 3. the existence non-native plants and associated seed banks on the road adjoining the site.

Cultural Resources:

The proposed project area was surveyed on March 3, 2004 by Bishop Field Office archaeologist, Kirk Halford. Twelve acres were fully inventoried to Class III standards, including the project area and a 20 meter buffer. No cultural resources were identified within the project area boundaries and no Historic Properties would be affected by the proposed undertaking. Refer to Cultural Resources Inventory Report CA-170-04-09 for a full discussion of the archaeological evaluations conducted.

Biological Resources:

The site does not include known habitat for any listed or sensitive species, nor is it a rare or unusual habitat type. Several wood rat nests and sagebrush lizards were observed on a site visit 29 March 2004, along with small burrows used by other small mammals or reptiles. Rock wrens calling offsite were the only birds noted and there were no landforms nor vegetation on the site that appeared to offer valuable bird habitat. The proposed project would disturb habitat for, and likely cause some direct mortality to, various small mammals and reptiles. The project would produce a long-term change in the nature of the habitat due to removal of large rocks, but other similar habitat exists nearby.

Air and Water Quality:

The proposed material sale is within a federal serious non-attainment area for Particulate Matter-10 microns (PM-10). The amount of dust generated from this project will be negligible and not violate the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for exceedance of PM-10 concentration per cubic meter of air. (As per phone conversation on June 15, 2004 with Earl Gann of Inyo County Planning Department and Ellen Hardebeck at Great Basin Air Pollution Control Board (GBAPCD)).

A skeleton bucket would scoop up the rock and load it into dump trucks. This would limit the amount of dust borne particles in the air by leaving more fine soils in place. Dust borne particulate matter would also be limited by the proposal's intent to crush and separate rock off-site and not in the vicinity of the proposed material site. Any air borne dust particles would be mitigated by using water spray trucks during mining procedures. BLM monitor would periodically assess whether ongoing watering requires increases to better contain air borne dust. There would be some off-site impacts of airborne dust from truck activity on nearby City of Los Angeles roads during material transportation to private land.

There would be no impact to Farm Lands, Flood Plains, nor water quality (including ground or surface waters).

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, mineral measures would not be provided for community and private use. Native vegetation would remain intact and not be impacted by increased non-native weed invasion. Outside sights and sounds affecting wilderness values would remain the same and not increase, thereby maintaining the wilderness area's existing outstanding opportunities for solitude near the proposed site. Animal habitat would remain intact as well. There would be no short term adverse effect on visual resources in the area, leaving the landscape intact and uniform.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts could include increases in non-native weed proliferation into a relatively intact ecosystem unless adequate implementation measures are implemented. The localized short term visual contrast in the area adds to visual fragmentation of existing mining related contrasts to the south. These contrasts would be remediated at the end of the project's life in three years and negate any cumulative visual impacts that might occur.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:

1. A watering truck will be used during road construction and extraction of materials to minimize dust activity from the operations. A BLM monitor will request additional water spreading as needed.
2. Locate project boundary markers around the site to identify area of disturbance. BLM will monitor and maintain boundary signs as needed.
3. If any late discoveries of artifactual or bone material occur during project implementation the project will halt and the Bishop Field Manager and Archaeologist will be consulted prior to resumption of work in the area.
4. Project proponent will ensure that equipment is weed free before site work occurs. Project proponent is responsible for treating any increases in weed cover as a result of the project. Prior to site treatment, the Bishop Field Office Weed Coordinator, Anne Halford will be contacted to discuss treatment options.
5. The proposed undertaking will have no affect to Historic Properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Persons/Agencies Consulted:

Kirk Halford, Archeologist, BLM Bishop field Office
Anne Halford, Botanist, BLM, Bishop Field Office
Joy Fatooh, Biologist, BLM Bishop Field Office
Joe Pollini, Wilderness Specialist, Supervisory Management Resource Specialist (SMRS), and Environmental Coordinator, BLM Bishop Field Office
Cheryl Seath, Geologist/Hazmat. Coord., BLM Bishop Field Office

Preparer:

Cheryl E. Seath Geologist/Hazmat. Coord.

Date: June 9, 2004

Environmental Coordinator:

Joe Pollini, Supervisory Management Resource Specialist

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____
Joe Pollini

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan. It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures identified below.

Mitigation Measures/Remarks:

1. A watering truck will be used during road construction and extraction of materials to minimize dust activity from the operations. A BLM monitor will request additional water spreading as needed.
2. Locate project boundary markers around the site to identify area of disturbance. BLM will monitor and maintain boundary signs as needed.
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Authorized Official: _____ **Date:** _____
Bill Dunkelberger
Bishop Field Office Field Manager

